

chores for us and helped keep our tent clean in return for whatever food we could scrounge for him. He also took our laundry home for his mother to wash for us. We provided the soap, with enough extra for use by the family, and she did a very good job, considering it was all done by hand. Even so, when I look at photos of myself wearing my work coveralls, I am struck by how dirty I must have been most of the time. Working on guns and bombs was a dirty, grimy job and after a while the grime was so ground into our work clothing that nothing could have removed it.

It was my observation that most American soldiers were very considerate of the Italian civilians who were terribly impoverished and without adequate food. But there was a limit to how much food we could filch from the mess for our "tent boy". I can still recall vividly one day when I was on a garbage detail at San Pancrazio and we took a truckload of garbage to a nearby dump. There were scores of local people there waiting to grab whatever they could find to eat. I saw one teen-age boy hit an old lady on the side of the head with a heavy stick to prevent her from picking up a can of something he wanted. The truck driver leveled his carbine at the boy and I thought for a moment he was going to shoot the kid, but he only intended to warn him not to do that again.

By 9 June our Squadron had flown 51 consecutive combat missions without the loss of a single plane. Our C.O. said it was the best record in the entire Air Force. On the 10th, however, Lonesome Polecat (114) was shot up and crashed in the Adriatic with a loss of two killed and seven injured. That night we had an unusual bomb load. By using special cables we double-loaded 250 lb. demolition bombs, managing to get 18 on each plane, rather than the usual 12. We could not get two bombs in the topmost position.

By 12 June the Air Force decided that summer had arrived and we were ordered to turn in our wool O.D.'s and two blankets. That very night the temperature dropped into the 40's and we shivered with just two blankets. We were also finally issued regular Army canvas cots, so we dismantled our homemade bunks for the last time.

On 15 June we heard the good news that B-29's had bombed Tokyo and that the Marines had invaded Saipan. We received very little news about the Pacific War, but this was an indication that progress was being made.

I had a pass on the 17th and spent the day visiting Foggia, Cerignola and Barletta. Since we were located within the Eighth Army zone in Italy we saw far more troops of our Allies than G.I.'s on the streets. In addition to the English there were Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, Poles, Free French, Scots and colonials such as Sikhs, Gurkhas, Rajputs, Algerians and Goums from Morocco. It was a fascinating kaleidoscope of men and uniforms. The Gurkhas and Goums (or Goumiers) were famed knife fighters and were generally used against German sentries and outposts at night. Many a German in Italy had his throat silently slit by these troops during the bitter fighting before Cassino. The Goums were fond of taking ears from their enemies and for a while the British were said to have given them bonuses for these

grisly trophies. From the standpoint of nationalities involved in the conflict, Italy was probably the most unique battlefield of the War.

On 24 June Dale Miller's crew finished their 50th mission and their war was over. Most of our original air crews were completing their combat tours in June and July and we were beginning to get more replacement crews in the Group. Another big event on the 24th was completion of our new Squadron shower facility by our Italian workmen. We now had the luxury of not only bathing but also of being able to cool off quickly during the hot summer months. Once the shower was operating I often took two showers a day just to cool off.

The following day we had the hardest rain we had experienced in Italy. Our dusty roads turned to quagmires and many tents flooded. This encouraged us to speed up the modification work on our tents - to finish our floors and sidewalls which we had been working on without a great deal of determination. I completed my corner within a few days and even built in a little alcove for reading and letter writing. We quickly went from the flood back to drought and on the last day of June a grass fire got out of control and burned down two tents in the officers' area.

Sometime probably in May or June (my journal didn't mention it) our Armament officer, Lt. Luhrs, was transferred and we got a new officer, Lt. Adams. He later made Captain and got an assistant, Lt. Cone, who had absolutely nothing to do and was well qualified for the job! On the third of July I was finally promoted to Corporal. I had about given up hope! For some time I had known that on our section Table of Organization (T.O.) I was listed as being in line to become a Staff Sergeant. I never made it. The problem was that whenever a gunner was taken off flight duty for medical reasons (we called it being "Flak Happy") he was almost invariably transferred to the Armament Section. Since every gunner had the rank of either Staff or Tech Sergeant, it meant that our T.O. was always filled at those levels. When Adams sent in a promotion request for any of the rest of us, Air Force H.Q. turned it down because we were already above our authorized quota for Non-Commissioned Officers. And there was nothing anyone could do about it.

During the heat of July we started getting rumors about moving to another theater, with Russia and India being mentioned as possibilities. This was more than the usual Army outhouse rumor. Lt. Adams was requested to start making packing estimates for all of our equipment and spares and several of us participated in the work. Eventually, however, nothing came of it.

Though we flew some 22 combat missions in July, we were hard pressed to get enough planes in the air for lack of crews. Our original crews were completing their 50 missions faster than we were receiving new crews and some days we were only able to put up four to six planes, as compared with the norm of twelve for a squadron. Some of our first crews had started home by the tenth of the month.

On 12 July I was delighted to have a visit from an old boyhood friend, Percy Dingle from Chesterland. We had been neighbors at Circle W Farm (Perc's father was in charge of Mrs. White's horses) and though he was

three years older than I we were close friends through our mutual interest in building model airplanes. Perc had gone into the Service in early '42 and was trained as a medic. He was later assigned to the 55th Station Hospital which was sent directly to North Africa during the invasion in November. After the African campaign ended at Bizerte his hospital moved first to Sicily, then to Italy.

I showed Perc all over our area and took him to the line to see our planes. He spent the night with me and the next day I arranged a pass and hitch-hiked with him back to his hospital at Caserta, where I had lunch before returning to the field. It was a very enjoyable and welcome interlude.

On 14 July our Group C.O., Col. Eaton, flew on my plane. Eaton was a rather large, even chubby, man and when he was dressed in his heavy flying suit and flak jacket he looked sort of like an armored blimp. He had to have an assist getting up into the plane. The target that day was an oil refinery in Hungary. The following day we hit another refinery near Ploesti. Most of our targets during July were refineries marshalling yards and aircraft factories.

On 16 July our remaining original crews, including Miller's, left for home via truck to Naples, where they embarked on a troop ship. In early '83, when Jack Garrison, Miller's tail gunner, visited me, I learned that they went home on the maiden voyage of the troopship U.S.S. General Meigs. This was the same ship which was to take us home less than one year later.

On 22 July we bombed Ploesti once again. On takeoff my plane, "Goosey Lucy" (#250) seemed to be lifting normally, but suddenly started to settle near the end of the runway. Just beyond the end of the runway the land dipped a bit, then rose to a small hill and finally dropped away abruptly to the valley below. I thought the ship would just clear the final hill, but instead it slammed into it and instantly caught fire. Several of us who were watching at the end of the runway ran over to the wreckage to help any survivors. I pulled one badly crushed man away from the flames but just as I started back to find someone else two of the 1000 pound bombs aboard exploded, one after the other. There was nothing else we could do. In all, five men were pulled out alive, though badly injured. The other five died, including the fellow I pulled away. They were members of Maj. Winski's crew and I knew them all very well. He had been serving as our Operations Officer and so was not the pilot that day.

I was deafened for two or three hours after the crash from the concussion of the bombs. I was also sick at heart over the deaths of friends and the loss of a plane that was part of my life. I spent most of the day in my cot, simply washed out.

Our planes flew quite a few practice missions during July for the purpose of training the new crews in formation flying and bombing techniques. Overall the quality of the replacement crews was far below that of our original crews. They generally seemed to lack motivation and interest in what they were doing. The gunners took little interest in their equipment and seldom cleaned their guns properly. After our



original crews (those who had not been lost in combat) returned home there was never again the genuine feeling of camaraderie which had previously existed between air and ground crews. Somehow, we could never seem to establish that close bond with the replacement crews. Even now, I am not sure why. It was at least partly because they seemed far less competent than our original crews, but also, I suspect, because they had not shared with us the long training at Wendover and Fairmont and had not suffered with us during the miserable winter days at Gioia and San Pancrazio.

Curiously, I had the same sort of feelings with regard to our aircraft. It would be difficult to explain to most people, but I developed a very close feeling of attachment (if that is the word) to "Big Mogul" and "Goosey Lucy" which I never again felt for any other plane I was assigned to after July of '44. This was partly, I suppose, because we had a greater turnover in planes after that date. Our Squadron lost at least four times as many planes in the second half of '44 as it lost in the first half of the year. Why this was true is difficult to say. It could not have been because of Luftwaffe opposition because our bomber flights had far better escort protection during the latter part of the year. During the early part of the year our planes were escorted only part way to their targets by Spitfires and P-38's, which simply didn't have enough range to escort all the way. Later in the year, however, bombers were escorted all the way to the target and back by long-range P-51's and P-47's, using belly drop tanks. In addition, the effectiveness of German fighters decreased significantly during the latter part of '44. The power of the Luftwaffe was in a sharp decline, from which it never recovered. Flak, however, was another matter - it remained a very serious threat well into '45 and most of our losses were from that source. Still, I doubt if our targets and their protective flak batteries were any more difficult in late '44 than earlier in the year. Thus, I cannot but think that our heavier losses later in the year were at least partly because of factors relating to crew training and discipline.

The numerous training flights which were scheduled during the summer required more work of the armorers. For practice gunnery missions we had to remove the combat ammunition and replace it with practice ammo. The latter consisted simply of lead bullets and tracers, whereas our combat ammo was belted in a sequence of two armor piercing bullets, two incendiary bullets and one tracer. For the practice bombing missions we actually had to load our old friends from training days, the 100 pound "Blue Screamer". It has always seemed incredible to me that the Air Force would have used up precious shipping space to transport training bombs to a combat area in time of war. Such training should have been accomplished in the States and that it was not done borders on incompetency, if not dereliction of duty.

On 25 July our Squadron led the entire 15th Air Force in an attack on the Hermann Goering Tank Factory at Linz. Our squadron had no losses and the Group claimed eleven German fighters destroyed. The following day on another mission "Three Feathers" (636) was damaged over Albania and was forced to land at an emergency field at Lecce. On the 28th "Ice Cold Katie II" (541) was shot down over Ploesti. On many occasions after missions, planes failed to return to base and we might have no idea what happened to them for days - they were simply missing.

Fortunately, in many such cases the pilot was able to make an emergency landing at some other field in southern Italy or elsewhere. The Partisans had carved out several emergency landing fields in Yugoslavia and on islands off the coast. There was also an emergency field on Corsica. After the planes were repaired and refueled they were flown back to our field, often weeks later and often in very bad condition from being exposed to salt spray, dust, etc.

Around the end of July we started to receive 500 pound bombs with the words, "Component B" stenciled on them. It meant nothing to us until sometime later that summer when a significant event occurred. I did not record the date in my diary but one day the Ordnance men from another Squadron (I believe it was the 727th) were loading bombs at the railroad yard for transfer to the bomb dump at our field when something went wrong and one or more bombs exploded. The men, their vehicle and the bomb trailer were blown to bits. Naturally, Ordnance officers from 15th Air Force Headquarters launched an immediate investigation. It turned out the men were loading "Component B" 500 pound bombs and the investigators concluded that they had either dropped a bomb on the concrete loading pad or had allowed two bombs to roll into one another with enough force to cause the explosion. The investigating team also discovered that no one at our base was aware that these new bombs contained, not T.N.T., but a new and far more sensitive explosive identified as R.D.X. We had simply "never gotten the word" from anyone in A.F.H.Q. In the course of their investigation they also discovered, apparently to their horror, our improvised method for unloading bombs from our planes by simply dropping them from the bomb rack to the ground. Belatedly, all armorers and ordnance men were given stern lectures on the inherent danger in handling these R.D.X. bombs and our "drop" method for unloading was forthwith prohibited. From that point on we handled these special bombs with tender, loving care and when we had to unload them we used the winches. However, as long as none of the officers were around we continued to use our quick drop method for unloading T.N.T. bombs. We heard, and I have since verified through documented reports, that at least two Eighth A.F. B-17's were blown up, along with their armorers, because of careless handling of R.D.X. bombs. So far as I know the accident cited above was the only one to occur in the 15th Air Force. It would appear that a number of ex-armorers may yet be living on borrowed time!

On 1 August I had a pass and I went to the Eighth Army area with the intent of trying to locate some German 9mm ammunition for an Italian pistol which I had obtained. I first went to a British tank training area where I managed to get a few rounds, then I headed towards the front on a British supply truck. Finally, an M.P. suggested I had better not go any farther without a helmet, as artillery was firing just a few hundred meters ahead of me. I was standing at the intersection of two roads talking with a small group of soldiers from New Zealand. The M.P. was directing traffic and there were a couple other soldiers on the other corner. Coming down the road from the front we saw a group of men marching towards us at route step. As they came closer we realized they were German prisoners being led by one of their own officers - a Major - and guarded by two armed British soldiers, one on either side of the column. There were perhaps 18 or 20 men in the group. When they were about a hundred feet from us the

Major barked a command and the soldiers all snapped to a smart march formation. It was clear to us that he wished his men to look and act like professional soldiers as they passed by us. Then an incredible thing happened. The six of us, five Kiwis and one G.I., without a word being spoken, suddenly snapped to attention and saluted this enemy officer and his men! The British M.P., noting our action, came to present arms and as he did the German Major returned the salute and held it till they were past the intersection. It was not a "Heil Hitler" Nazi salute, but a conventional military salute. That tableau of mutual military respect between victors and captives is forever etched in my memory. Why did we, without conscious thought or agreement, tender that salute to our enemy? Was it an automatic response to the officer's uniform or a deliberate reply to their shift from route-step to marching cadence as they passed us? To this day I really don't know. At the time it seemed the proper thing to do. One of the New Zealanders summed it up for all of us when he said, "I've fought those blighters for two and a half years and I'll have to say this for them, they're bloody good soldiers".

Whenever I was around a British outfit I looked forward to the chance of watching a parade formation, especially Retreat. I was fascinated by the professional way they marched, the way they swung their arms and executed maneuvers. British soldiers were, and I suppose still are, masters at marching. Virtually every British outfit I ever saw in formation looked like a professional drill team. By contrast, most Americans marched very poorly, on the average. Perhaps it is because the British take more pride in their military heritage and in their regimental history, while Americans, especially citizen-soldiers, tend to take a dim view of military spit-and-polish and regimentation in general. There surely must be an intrinsic difference between serving, for example, in the Grenadier Guards or the Black Watch, as opposed to the 123rd Regiment or the 78th Brigade.

On the 5th of August we had another very heavy rain which flooded most of the tents. Italy seemed to have a climate of extremes; either we were wading in mud or choking in dust. We often wondered where the expression "sunny Italy" came from! The following day we got in a new plane, # 484, which was mine, to replace Goosey Lucy. She was assigned to Lt. Olds, who named her "Merry Barbara" after his wife. She was to last for just six missions - after another raid on Ploesti on the 17th Olds had to ditch her in the Adriatic. Only he and one gunner survived. I worked on her for two days before her first mission.

Some evenings after our work was done several of us who were close friends would have a sort of party in the bombsight shack. We shared food which we received in packages from home and sometimes we even had boiled eggs which we had purchased at a fairly high price from a local farm family. One of the bombsight technicians had somehow managed to find a small hotplate which we used to heat up C rations and to toast bread from the mess hall. Our regular meals at the mess hall, which the Italian workers had built for us, were reasonably good, but monotonous. We never had any fresh meat or vegetables, of course, as everything came from the states canned. There was canned butter which was awful and canned Spam which we could hardly face any more after the first few months. And then there was the ubiquitous chipped beef on bread which we called, "shit on a shingle". But we survived!



On 10 August we flew our 100th combat mission - once again against the Ploesti oil refineries. The next day "Three Feathers" returned to the field after her forced landing on 26 July. She was in terrible shape. Much of the loose equipment, including several guns, had been thrown overboard in the emergency and the remaining guns were badly rusted from exposure. Under normal operations we and the gunners covered all turrets and guns with heavy canvas covers to protect them from rain and dew. We spent several days cleaning and replacing guns and other equipment before "Three Feathers" could go back to work.

On 12 August five members of our Armament Section, in accordance with orders received a few days earlier, left for home. Neither they nor the rest of us had any idea why they were being shipped home. We always assumed they were being sent to be assigned to a B-29 Group or to help train new armorers.

On 14 August the entire 15th Air Force pounded the southern coast of France to soften up the beachhead for the invasion which took place the next morning. The aircrews reported seeing over 800 vessels of all types headed for France. This came as no surprise to most of us, as ships had been concentrating in harbors on the west coast of Italy for several days. On a practice flight two or three days earlier I had seen hundreds of ships in Naples harbor. On the 15th, while taking off on another mission to the southern France beach area, one of our planes, "Cannon Fodder" (# 102) crashed, killing three crew members.

In early July the Air Force had established a policy of granting three-day rest passes to Rome for enlisted ground crew personnel who had served overseas at least six months. There had already been a rest and relaxation (R & R) policy for the air crews, for whom a rest camp had been established on the Isle of Capri. I'm sure there was also a separate rest camp for ground Officers, complete with lots of booze, dancing girls and liveried flunkies, but I knew nothing about it. At any rate my turn for a pass to Rome came on the 17th. I, with eight or ten others, flew to Rome on "Skipper" a tired old B-24 which had been converted to transport duty, which included flights to Cairo to pick up liquor for the officers' club. The flight took 45 minutes. I bummed a ride into the city and located a place to stay which had been recommended to me by one of our other guys who had recently returned from his pass. It was a flat owned by a very nice middle-aged lady whose husband was a Colonel in the Italian Army who had been captured by the British in 1942. She had not heard from him since his capture but had been notified he was safe in a British prisoner of war camp in Canada. She had one extra room which she rented out to G.I.'s for 150 Lira. Before I left the field I had managed to "requisition" from our kitchen a half can of coffee, some chocolate, a couple cans of Spam and one or two other things which I stuffed in my duffel bag for the trip. My buddy Johnnie had told me how kind the lady had been to him and what a tough time she was having just trying to survive. She was absolutely overjoyed with this small amount of food and told me I could have the room at no charge. I wouldn't agree, of course, and as I recall, I gave her about 800 Lira for the three nights I spent there. The room was small but pleasant, with a fairly comfortable bed and immaculately clean linens.

After arranging for the room I took my camera and went to the nearby Red Cross Service Club to get a light lunch. There I also managed to get a map of the city and I promptly set off to see all the Roman ruins I had read so much about in ancient history. That afternoon and for the next two days I really walked my legs off visiting and photographing every ruin within walking distance. Fortunately, most of them were concentrated around the Forum. As a history buff, I was in "hog heaven", and I knew it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

It was very hot most of the time, but I was on the go almost from first light till dark. I grabbed quick meals at the Service Club. On the 18th I spent most of my time at Vatican City, seeing St. Peters, the fabulous Vatican museums and the Sistine Chapel. Cameras were not allowed in the church and museums but I carried mine under my shirt and managed to sneak several pictures, constantly wondering whether, if caught, one of those Swiss Guards would cleave my skull with his halberd!

Each night, after supper, I returned to my room and usually visited with my landlady. During the previous six months I had tried my best to learn Italian from our "tent boy" and from the Italian kitchen helpers. I was able to converse reasonably well with them by this time and was anxious to try out my hard won new skill with my hostess. It proved to be something of a disaster. There are, it seems, very distinct dialects in Italy and the southern peasant variety which I had been trying so hard to learn was looked upon with disdain by educated Romans, such as my kindly landlady. In addition, I had the distinct impression that some of the words I had learned were simply not used in polite conversation. She very patiently corrected much of what I tried to say, but nevertheless we got along fairly well.

On the 19th I visited a number of places I had missed the first day, including the Pantheon. Sunday morning, the 20th I took a Red Cross sponsored tour of the catacombs, walked along part of the Appian Way and went for one last time to gaze, with wonder and awe, at the Colosseum. Then, late in the afternoon, I bid goodbye to my landlady, and caught a G.I. bus to the airport. I flew back to our field on "Flabbergasted Fanny" (# 242).

When I got back it was a shock to learn about "Merry Barbara" which went down the very day I left for Rome. The next day, 22 August, proved to be perhaps our most disastrous mission. Out of 28 planes which the Group flew to bomb oil storage facilities near Vienna, 14 were shot down, mostly by ME-109's, and several others were placed in Class 26 after returning because of severe damage. (Class 26 was a designation for planes so badly damaged that they could not be repaired at the Squadron level. These planes were moved to the 60th Air Service Squadron where they managed to repair some, while others were scrapped for parts.) Our Squadron lost three planes, "Old Taylor" (# 111), "Wet Dream" (# 300) and "Screamin' Meemie II" (# 580). In addition, "The A Train" (# 082) was put in Class 26. It was a very black day for us. No Bomb Group could survive losses like that for very long. The following day, however, was to be almost as bad.



On 23 August our target was the Markersdorf Airdrome near Vienna. We put up 25 planes, of which nine were shot down by FW-190's before they reached the target. We claimed 18 enemy fighters destroyed, with another eight probably destroyed. Our bombs were well aimed at the airdrome and destroyed at least 12 German fighters on the ground. The German fighters apparently concentrated on our Group, as the 484th and 461st Groups suffered only minor loss. For this mission our Group was awarded its third Distinguished Unit Citation - our second Oak Leaf Cluster. Our Squadron losses were "Small Fry" (# 429) and # 334.

Towards the end of August we were starting to fly some Group missions with radar planes (Mickey's) flying lead. The Air Force was apparently satisfied that these new planes could bomb effectively through clouds and overcast which made optical bombsights useless. The radar planes were officially called Pathfinders. They were especially equipped with a photoflash flare mounted in a steel cylinder at the tail. When the Bombardier in the Pathfinder released his load on the target the flash bomb was automatically ignited and sent a very bright flash out both ends of the cylinder in which it was mounted. This could be seen for miles and was the signal for all the other Bombardiers in the Group to drop their bomb loads. In most cases the other planes didn't even carry a bombsight on such missions. The results were not always something to brag about and there is little doubt that a great many bombs so dropped fell off target with resultant civilian casualties.

This sort of bombing was much like the area bombing used by the R.A.F. and was, I think, an admission by the U.S. Air Force that its much touted precision daylight bombing was not an unqualified success in every case. Earlier in the war American Bombardiers had bragged that they could "hit a pickle barrel from 25,000 feet". While it is true that our Sperry and, especially, our Norden computing bombsights were far superior to any other bombsight in use at the time, the pickle barrel boast was something of an overstatement. Under ideal training conditions in Utah or Arizona, with little wind and clear skies, one might not have been wise to sit on that pickle barrel. But over Vienna, Weiner Neustadt or Schweinfurt with the sky blackened by flak bursts, with FW-190's and ME-109's screaming through the formations and with other B-24's and B-17's disintegrating or going down in flames, it was quite another matter. Under those stressful conditions it was asking very much of pilots to hold the level, true course from the I.P. to the A.P. which our bombsights required to null out the error rates. It took a very conscientious Bombardier to resist the temptation to drop early and call "Now let's get the hell out of here!" over the intercom. In short, there is a wide gulf between ultimate capability under ideal conditions and practical performance under combat conditions.

On 24 August, though it was still blistering hot, we received orders from our Executive Officer that we must have our tents winterized within the next week. It was also decided that we were to go to six men per tent, rather than eight. Since I was one of the last to join the tent-group I was in at that time, I and five other fellows in the same situation got together to form a new tent-group. The next day we drew a new tent from supply, cleared a patch of ground and erected it using some nice 4 X 4's which we "requisitioned" from the officers'

latrine in the dark of night, as corner posts. The next day we started laying a floor with wood from frag bomb boxes and moved in that night. Though it continued to be very hot we went ahead with boarding up the sides of the tent, since September was nearly upon us and we knew cold weather was coming soon. To gain more room inside the tent we erected a rectangular framework to eliminate the center pole. I computed the frame lengths and angles by simple geometry and the other guys were amazed when every piece fit perfectly.

The Russians captured Bucharest the end of the month and thus another of our former targets was gone. Increasingly, we were called upon to bomb bridges and viaducts in northern Italy to impede the movement of German forces. It always seemed to me that this was a terrible waste of strategic bomber capabilities. In the first place such targets are very difficult to hit by horizontal bombing and the results often confirmed that. Secondly, one must question the potential risk of losing heavy bombers on an installation which is a natural target for dive or fighter bombers.

On 2 September we had a group practice formation at Headquarters in preparation for the formal presentation of our first two Distinguished Unit Citations. We marched to Headquarters then went through a "pass in review" ceremony three times and then marched back to the Squadron area. It was very hot and dusty and when we got back we were black with dirt and our uniforms were filthy. The formal ceremony took place on 3 September. General Nathan Twining arrived at 1300 for the presentation, which went off quite well.

That same day we were supposed to bomb another bridge in Yugoslavia, but after only three planes had lifted off, # 679, a new plane on her first mission, nosed over and blew up at the end of the runway, blocking all further take-offs that day.

The next day was one of the worst we had that summer, in terms of weather. Gale winds blew all day, turning up huge clouds of heavy, choking dust which got into our food, covered our blankets in the tents and even sifted into the planes, in spite of our having closed them tightly and covered all the turrets and guns.

A very strange sequence of events started on 7 September. That afternoon we were ordered to prepare for a poison gas mission. We were told only that the planes would be leaving the field for at least one week and would operate during that period from another country. The rumor was that the country was Russia, though we were never told that. We had always known that our local bomb dump contained a supply of bombs which were filled with Lewisite gas, a very potent nerve gas. Our Chemical Warfare men were required to check these bombs periodically to check against any possible leakage. That afternoon they were ordered to prepare those bombs for delivery to the field. I do not know the size of the bombs, as I never saw one, but I think I recall being told they were about 500 pounds.

I was one of the armorers who were ordered to accompany the planes. We each drew seven day's worth of K and C rations from supply and had our gas masks and protective clothing thoroughly checked by the Chemical

Warfare men. That protective clothing included specially impregnated long Johns, gloves and socks which we had been issued before leaving the States. The stuff was awful - it smelled like a dead billy goat and many of the fellows had thrown theirs away or sold it to the Arabs in Africa. Like a good soldier, I had kept mine in the bottom of my duffel bag, wrapped in a piece of plastic. All this activity came to naught when the mission was called off that night just as we were waiting for the bombs to be moved to the planes from the dump. We were never told anything more about this proposed mission. I have often speculated since, whether the Allies had learned, through Ultra, that Hitler was considering using poison gas against the Russians and were prepared in that event to retaliate. I would still like to know!

This strange, cancelled mission was similar to another which I did not even know about at the time. I only learned of it from Jack Garrison in the winter of '83 when he visited me. Jack tells me that on or about 13 February '44 the aircrews were briefed on a scheduled mission to bomb the V-1 installations at Peenemunde. Since the target was so far from our field, the planes would not be able to return to Italy after the mission. After dropping their bombs, each pilot was to be on his own to land his plane wherever he could, preferably England, but even in Russia or neutral Sweden, if necessary. This mission, too, was cancelled before the planes were loaded. The ground crews never had knowledge of this particular briefing. It seems very strange to me that the 15th Air Force would actually plan such a mission, which would undoubtedly result in the loss of many B-24's and crews, when Peenemunde was such a natural target for the 8th Air Force.

On 8 September we actually did initiate a series of unusual missions. That day our engineers loaded twelve 55 gallon drums of gasoline in the waist of each of our planes. We, in turn, were ordered to remove the bomb hoists, all guns and the ammunition from the ball, waist and tail positions to reduce weight. What was going on we wondered? Once again the rumor mill had it that we would be moving somewhere, probably France. All the next day we continued to speculate while the planes remained on the ground and nothing happened. They lowered the boom on us that night. After we had all gone to bed, at 23:30, we were called out and told that we had to remove the Sperry ball turrets from nine of our planes and, in addition, load them each with twelve 500 pound bombs! A typical military snafu! Here we could have done that work during the day, while it was light and we were idle, but, instead, we had to do it in the dark of night!

None of us had ever removed a ball turret before, so we had to devise the procedure as we went along. There were, of course, no lights at the revetments so we had only the internal lights of the plane to work by. Each B-24 had its own 24 volt auxiliary generator aboard, located just forward of the bomb bay on the port side. It was a regulated generator driven by a small, single cylinder gasoline engine, much like a lawn mower engine, and probably made by Briggs & Stratton. We always called it the "Put-Put". When operating, it powered all the aircraft electrical systems and we used the Put-Put for lights at night, to avoid draining the plane's batteries.



We very quickly found that we could not remove the turrets once they were mechanically and electrically disconnected because of the low clearance between the plane and the ground. We then had to call out the Crew Chiefs and mechanics to get large hydraulic jacks with which to jack up the tails of the planes in order to lower and remove the turrets. Our entire Armament Section was out that night, working in teams of two, and somehow we finished the job, including loading the bombs, by 0630.

That next day, the 10th, the planes still did not fly and we removed guns, ammo and ball turrets from two additional planes. On the 11th the planes took the load of bombs and gasoline to an airfield near Lyons, France. It seemed we were doing ferry service, supplying the Tactical Air Force in France to make up for a serious supply shortage. Overall, we completed eight such supply missions to Bron Airdrome near Lyons, the last on 22 September. Before the supply missions were over we received some bomb bay gasoline tanks which allowed some of the planes to carry far more gasoline per trip. On the 12th the French field was closed in and some idiot in operations scheduled a practice gunnery mission instead. After we re-installed the guns and ammo on several of our planes, they called it off and we had to once again remove the guns and ammo! I sometimes wonder how we won the war with such utter fools in positions of authority.

On 15 September we changed from British Double Summer Time back to Greenwich Mean Time.

We received two new planes on 20 September with completely redesigned waist gun positions. Each gun was mounted through a flexible mount in the fuselage so the waist gunners no longer had to fire through the open windows. In addition, the old ring-and-post iron sights were replaced with new compensating optical sights. The sight reticle was driven in azimuth and elevation by flexible cables so as to automatically compensate for gun motion as the gunner tracked his target. It was a significant improvement in armament and the same sort of compensating sights were installed in the nose and upper turrets.

On 23 September we re-installed all the ball turrets and, after supper, put the guns and ammo back in. We were back in the bomber business once again! We flew missions to an airdrome and sub-pens in Greece on the 24th and 25th but were grounded the rest of the month because of weather. On the 27th we loaded 2000 pound bombs again. This time it went much easier after our first experience, but, because of the weather, the mission was cancelled for several days and we finally had to unload them and remove the racks on 2 October.

Whenever the field or target was weathered in and we had little to do, we could play softball or horseshoes for relaxation. In the evenings there were the inevitable card games and the movies at Group Headquarters to use up the idle hours. In my own spare time I wrote a lot of short letters, using V-Mail, and also did a lot of reading. I had obtained several Army training manuals on mathematics and physics which I studied whenever I wasn't too weary. We also had our E.M. Club building where we could buy wine by the glass. Sometimes brandy was available but we never had beer or hard liquor.

As October arrived the weather turned much colder and we knew winter was upon us. We had not yet constructed a stove for our new tent and we were cold at night, even sleeping under four blankets. It was the coldest we had been for a long while. The high winds made it even worse. On 2 October we were issued our wool O.D. uniforms and about ten days later we received our new Eisenhower jackets and G.I. wool sweaters. The new short jackets replaced the old wool blouses we formerly had and were much more comfortable and better looking.

We started flying a number of split missions where two Squadrons would bomb one target and the other two would hit another. It was clear that we were beginning to run out of strategic targets, though there were still many missions to Germany and Austria. During the latter half of '44 we started dropping "chaff", sometimes codenamed "window", on the way to those targets to confuse German radar, which had improved considerably during the year. Chaff was simply bundles of aluminum foil cut into narrow strips, perhaps 1/16th inch wide by 18" long. It looked very much like the tinsel used to decorate Christmas trees and was dispensed by hand through special chutes which had been mounted in the waist area of each plane. We also dropped quite a number of leaflet bombs over Germany towards the latter part of the year. These were canisters which contained a large quantity of propaganda leaflets that urged German citizens to recognize they were losing the War and to surrender while they could. These leaflets scattered over a wide area when they were ejected by an explosive charge.

On 13 October we bombed Vienna and received heavy flak, as usual. Our Squadron lost two planes, with another missing but presumed down at an emergency field. Another ship made a belly landing when the pilot could not lower his gear and flaps. The next day, on a mission to an oil refinery near Blechhammer, # 947 was badly hit over the target and its crew bailed out. It was the new plane's first mission! Another plane, # 952, made an emergency landing on an island off Yugoslavia. On the 16th, while taking off on a mission to Linz, the number one turbo on plane # 198 ran away, causing the propeller to spin off and cut a main landing gear strut. The plane crashed just off the runway and was a total loss. We later removed all the equipment we could salvage and the Service Squadron towed it away.

On 18 October I received a new plane to replace my previous plane which had been transferred. It was # 941 and had the new waist guns plus another change - external ammo boxes and chutes for the ball turret. As usual, I had to spend full time for a couple days getting it ready for combat. From this point in time I can only refer to most of our planes by tail number. The replacement crews very seldom gave their ships names of any sort and somehow the planes had lost their previous identity and character. There would be no more Three Feathers, Flabbergasted Fannys, Ice Cold Katies or Big Moguls. The war had become even more impersonal.

By the end of October we had finished building a new stove for our tent and were ready for most anything Italy had to offer in the way of cold weather. On the 25th we received a new bomb to load, one we had not encountered before, a 500 pound incendiary. After being grounded for three days the planes were unable to locate their target because

of clouds on the 29th and returned to the field with full bomb loads. We finally had to take those big incendiaries off and replace them with 500 pound RDX bombs.

The first week of November, surprisingly, brought us warm, spring-like weather for a few days. On the first we bombed Vienna, with its massed flak batteries. "The Bad Penny", # 321, went down over the target and # 623 had to make a forced landing at Foggia. Most of our planes were grounded on the second so we took advantage of the free time to haul several weapons carrier loads of gravel from the creek to make a winter-proof walkway for our tent. That evening five radar planes left for an after dark raid on Vienna. The night of 3 November we again loaded those 500 pound incendiaries which were dropped the following day on a marshalling yard in Germany.

I began to receive the first of my Christmas packages during the first week of November and most of the goodies were eaten as they arrived.

On 7 November our planes went on what was supposed to be a milk run to a marshalling yard near Sarajevo. Instead, they ran into heavy flak. The tail gunner on # 055 was badly wounded, # 045 landed on an island off Yugoslavia and # 585 had to go to the 60th Service Squadron for major repair work.

On the eighth we heard the great news that F.D.R. had been re-elected. Most soldiers had the highest respect for Roosevelt and there was general rejoicing at his re-election.

On 9 November the weather turned very cold again and by the 11th all of the surrounding mountaintops were covered with snow. The bad weather grounded us for four days and as a result we flew several practice missions with the usual loading and unloading of bombs and ammunition. When the weather cleared we bombed marshalling yards at Munich on the 16th. We lost # 623 that day when a bomb from a plane above fell right through her wing. It was the sort of thing that seemed to happen all too often with the new crews!

After we had another frag bomb mission we started to put up a second, double side wall on our tent for additional insulation. Our tents were rapidly becoming small wooden huts with canvas roofs.

On 20 November we bombed an oil refinery at Blechhammer and were mauled badly again. We lost # 952 over the target, # 662 cracked up while attempting an emergency landing at Foggia Main, # 630 nosed in while landing and was put in Class 26 and # 677 also had a bad landing but was thought to be repairable. It was a rough day at Blechhammer!

By the 21st the weather had turned rainy and within a few days we were living in a world of mud. We bombed Munich by radar on the 22nd, through a heavy overcast. The 23rd was Thanksgiving and our cooks did themselves proud with a great meal served at 1530. The Army had flown in frozen turkeys and there was more than enough to go around. We even had seconds on some things. It was our first fresh meat since Christmas at Oran and a much better meal. I still remember it with pleasure.



On 26 November we loaded 500 pound bombs which incorporated the "booby" fuzes which I described earlier. Every other plane also carried a leaflet bomb which was filled with leaflets warning civilians about the delayed action fuzes and the danger of trying to remove them. For the next five days our planes were grounded by cold, rainy and overcast weather. We were booby-trapped by our own bombs! Because the bomb loads could not be safed by removing the fuzes, we had to mount an around-the-clock armed guard on every plane. Everyone, up to and including the rank of buck sergeant, had to serve on 12 hour guard shifts every other day or so. The weather was miserable with intermittent cold rain and mud, mud, mud. Finally, on 2 December, we got off a mission and they unloaded those infernal bombs on the oil refinery at Blechhammer. In spite of the bad weather, we flew 19 missions in November and the same number the following month.

On 3 December we had a bit of a party at our E.M. club to celebrate the anniversary of boarding ship at Newport News. Any excuse for a party! I left early when I saw it was turning into a drunken brawl. On 5 December our bomb load was six 500 pounders per plane. This unusually light load meant a very long mission, but whatever it was it was cancelled, as we were called out at midnight to load four more bombs on each plane.

During the nights of 6 and 7 December one of our newest radar planes, # 055, went on a secret mission, leaving at about 0230. We were never told the targets for such solo missions. On the night of the 9th we again loaded bombs equipped with booby fuzes, as well as the usual leaflet bombs. The next day, when the bombardiers couldn't find the target through the overcast, they salvoed those bombs into the Adriatic Sea rather than bring them home. After another attack on Vienna on the 11th, # 585 was lost, and both 613 and 677 were badly damaged and landed at emergency fields.

We bombed the oil refineries near Blechhammer three days in a row, 17, 18 & 19 December. On the first raid # 045 and # 941 collided in mid-air over the target and went down in flames. The next day we lost # 626, and that night our Squadron had only three aircraft capable of flying on the mission the following day.

On the 19th and 20th we received two new "L" model planes to replace some of our losses. These new planes had completely redesigned tail turrets with much better gunsights and smoother controls.

The weather continued cold, often wet, and always miserable. A Christmas eve party in the E.M. club turned into another drunken brawl and a number of us went back to our tents to sing carols. We bombed even on Christmas Day, with our target being the Wels, Austria marshalling yards. On the 26th we bombed an oil refinery in Poland, the deepest our Group had ever penetrated Festung Europa. My brand new plane, on its second mission, was lost over the target.

By this time, late in the month, the weather had cleared and was beautiful for several days, with clear blue skies. But on the last day of the year we received a heavy snow. New Year's Eve brought another party at the E.M. club, with lots of ammunition and flares expended!